

During a dinner meeting with King Abdullah, we were joined by Jim Wolfenson, the former head of the World Bank. Dr. Wolfenson was recently selected, as my colleagues know, by President Bush to handle the upcoming Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, focusing on the quartet of partners and building the appropriate support. I applaud the President for his choice in this emissary. Not only is Dr. Wolfenson eminently capable, but he knows many of the important players directly, professionally, and personally, and he appreciates the stakes and I am confident he can get the job done.

Dr. Wolfenson understands the transition must go well. If it does not, violent unrest and instability could destroy this, what I believe is a historic chance for peace. The Jordanians have been an invaluable partner in Operation Enduring Freedom. They have made tremendous contributions to the Iraqi people's efforts to secure a free and prosperous Iraq.

We have witnessed the extraordinary bravery of the Iraqis at the polling booths and at the police recruitment centers. They have been willing to defy the terrorists and assume an active role in securing democracy.

Many of those courageous Iraqis are acquiring the training and skills needed to defend their country by completing a security course and police training regimen in Jordan.

We had the opportunity, while in Jordan, to visit the Jordan-Iraq Police Training Center, a truly unique effort where 16 countries have come together, including the United States, Jordan, Britain, Canada, Finland, and others, to train the Iraqi security force—to train the Iraqi police. The director of the facility is John Moseby, a highly qualified veteran of the U.S. Air Force.

The center's goal in Jordan is to train 32,000 Iraqi police by December 2005. Already, the center has graduated over 15,000 recruits, who have gone back to Iraq to serve in security positions. There are currently 40 Iraqi trainers at the site in Jordan, and the center hopes to add another 60. It sits on about 450 acres and can train about 3,500 cadets per session.

I wanted to go to the Jordan-Iraq Police Training Center to see firsthand how those exercises are conducted because there has been some question in the past as to the adequacy and the quality of that training. Having had the opportunity to meet the cadets, both an incoming class and classes that were leaving, viewing many of the exercises, viewing, with the leaders there, the commitment to a quality curriculum, I am very reassured they are doing an outstanding job in training those Iraqi recruits to go back and keep their communities and their streets safe.

The Iraqi cadets told us of their hope and appreciation for America's help in building a new Iraq. I am confident that by their courage and their commitment, freedom will prevail in Iraq

and the dark forces that now threaten their country will be defeated.

The trip throughout the Middle East was fascinating and informative. We met many vibrant and thoughtful people. Again and again, you hear, throughout all the countries, this expressed hope, the universal dream of hope that the people of the Middle East will one day be truly free—free from violence and oppression, free to express their will through democratically elected leaders, free to express themselves in the town square without fear of violence or terrorism.

I do applaud President Bush for his vision and for his unwavering belief in the dignity and rights of all people. From Darfur to Damascus, from Baghdad to Beirut, liberty is the hope of mankind.

Here in the Senate, I encourage and urge my colleagues to continue to do our part to ensure that these principles help shape the future of the Middle East. I believe together, with our partners around the globe, we can spread prosperity and peace. I believe it is the only way.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The minority leader is recognized.

ISRAEL

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I have listened to the leader's statements these past days on his trip to the Middle East. It is a fascinating place. I returned about a month ago myself. But the one thing that I always see in the Middle East is this tiny, little State of Israel, surrounded by these other countries that are about as undemocratic as a country could be.

Israel is a democracy. Every day we hear about what is going on in the Middle East, we should realize that. Israel has risen above this. They maintain their democratic principles in spite of the violence that is going on, on a daily basis, in that part of the world.

JUDICIAL NOMINATIONS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, yesterday afternoon the majority leader and I met one last time trying to reach a compromise that would avert the so-called nuclear option. The so-called nuclear option is nothing that we named. I know for cosmetic purposes those in the majority now have tried to call it a "constitutional option," which must be directly out of Orwell's book "1984" because it means everything but a constitutional option. The name came from the Republican leadership last year. So the "nuclear option" is a name from the majority, not us.

I do not know if they met with my friend, Frank Luntz, or with whom

they met to change the name from "nuclear option" to a softer sounding proposal, "constitutional option." As I said, violating 217 years of standard procedure in the Senate, changing the rules by breaking the rules, is about as far as you could get from a constitutional option.

But it appears that my distinguished friend, the majority leader, cannot accept any solution which does not guarantee all current and future judicial nominees an up-or-down vote. That result is unacceptable to me because it is inconsistent with constitutional checks and balances. It would essentially eliminate the role of the Senate minority in confirming judicial nominations and turn the Senate into a rubber stamp for the President's choices. In fact, the majority should look carefully at what they are getting because not only would this eliminate the role of the Senate's minority but also the majority in judicial confirmations. The majority would be eliminated, too. The Senate would no longer have a role.

I can only conclude that the true purpose of the nuclear option is not to win confirmation of some or all of the small handful of nominees Democrats filibustered last year. Remember, today it stands at 208 to 10. And focusing on the number 10 is somewhat misleading because of the 10, 3 have either withdrawn or retired. And we have said, time and time again, that 2 of the remaining 7 we would agree to 10 minutes from now—2 Michigan judges. So it is really 208 to 5—208 to 5.

So the goal, it appears to me, of the Republican leadership—and note I do not say of the mainstream Republicans in this country, I do not say of the Republicans in the Senate—but, rather, the goal of the Republican leadership in this body and their allies in the White House is to pave the way for the future, so that the Senate would basically be eliminated from the confirmation process. They don't want consensus, they want confrontation.

Yesterday, after rejecting our last attempt at a compromise, the majority leader issued a statement. In this statement, the majority leader said there is going to be an upcoming debate over judicial nominations, and he said he hoped the upcoming debate is free from "procedural gimmicks like the filibuster." That is a quote: "procedural gimmicks like the filibuster," "procedural gimmicks like the filibuster."

We had a freshman Senator go to the Middle East and tell the leader of Iraq that the United States was different than any other country in the world because of the filibuster—a Republican Senator. A gimmick?

The filibuster is not a procedural gimmick. The filibuster is an important check on executive power and part of every Senator's right to free speech in the Senate. ROBERT BYRD, on Thursday, from this desk right behind mine, talked about free speech.

Senator ROBERT BYRD has been in the Senate for approximately 25 percent of